

Summary Report for 6 Streams Within Amherst County Nominated for Exceptional Waters Designation April 28 & 29, 2005

As required by DEQ Exceptional State Waters guidance, David Whitehurst from Central Office and Amanda Gray and Michael Shaver of the South Central Regional Office conducted site surveys of six streams within Amherst County to determine if the water bodies nominated by the Amherst County Service Authority for Tier III designation met the eligibility criteria required for regulatory designation as Exceptional State Waters. Site surveys were conducted on the following dates/streams:

April 28th – Shady Mountain Creek, Roberts Creek, Little Cove Creek, Rocky Branch, and a portion of the North Fork Buffalo River
April 29th – Cove Creek

Boundary Descriptions **Shady Mountain Creek**

Shady Mountain Creek from its headwaters downstream to its confluence with the Pedlar River.



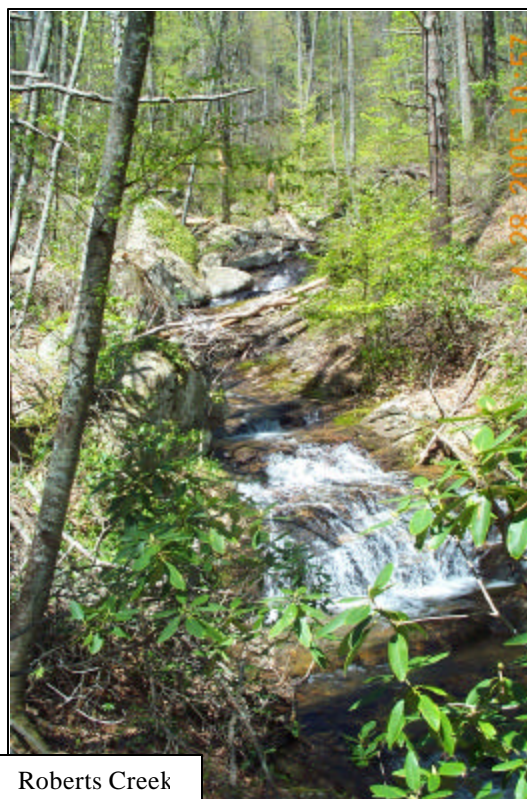
Roberts Creek

Roberts Creek its confluence with the Pedlar River upstream to its first crossing with the National Forest boundary.

Observations

Both of these streams are in close proximity to each other, tributaries to the Pedlar River, and are within the George Washington National Forest. They are accessible by a Forest Service road that crosses them. Upstream of the road they are high gradient streams and are characterized by cobble, boulder and plunge pools.

A cursory benthic survey was done and pollution intolerant species were noted though abundance appeared to be less above the road which may be attributed to the scouring affects associated with high gradient streams during periods of rain. As the gradient lessened below the road benthic macroinvertebrates appeared to become more



numerous. Both have exceptional environmental settings and offer an excellent opportunity for a relatively remote hiking and/or camping experience.

Roberts Creek is classified as Class VI Native Trout Waters in the Water Quality Standards (9 VAC 25-260-430) but is unclassified by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF). Juvenile brook trout were observed in the stream the day of the site visit. Shady Mountain Creek is classified as Class III Piedmont Zone water by the Water Quality Standards but is unclassified by the DGIF.

Boundary Descriptions

Cove Creek

Cove Creek from its headwaters downstream to the National Forest boundary.

Little Cove Creek

Little Cove Creek and its tributaries from their headwaters downstream to the National Forest boundary.

Rocky Branch

Rocky Branch from its headwaters downstream to the National Forest boundary.

North Fork Buffalo River

North Fork of the Buffalo River from its confluence with Rocky Branch downstream to the National Forest Boundary.

Observations

Cove Creek, Little Cove Creek, and Rocky Branch are tributaries to the North Fork Buffalo River, in close proximity to each other and as such exhibit similar characteristics. All are

high gradient streams as is the nominated portion of the NF Buffalo River and their substrates are predominantly large cobble and boulder. The large rocks dominate to the point that they define the character of the stream. Each has numerous plunge pools and waterfalls of various heights with Rocky Branch possessing some of the highest and picturesque.

All are listed as Class VI Native Trout Waters in the Water Quality Standards (9 VAC 25-260-430) and all are also classified by DGIF as Class II native trout streams, its second highest trout stream classification. A cursory benthic survey was done at points on all nominated streams and numerous individuals of the families ephemeroptera (mayflies), plecoptera (stoneflies), and trichoptera (caddis flies) were observed and appears to support a diverse benthic community. Brook trout were observed in the NF Buffalo River.



Falls at Rocky Branch

An established trail parallels the NF Buffalo River and the headwaters of the three tributaries are in close proximity to the Appalachian Trail. These nominated waters provide excellent opportunities for day hikes, overnight backpacking and/or primitive camping, small stream native trout fishing, photography, and bird- and wildlife watching.

Conclusions

The agency staff that conducted the site visit to Shady Mountain and Roberts Creeks are in agreement that these water bodies possess exceptional environmental settings as well as provide excellent hiking, camping, and other recreational opportunities and supports a healthy, though somewhat limited, benthic community. The apparent lack of abundance in the upper reaches of these streams is most likely attributable to a naturally occurring lack of habitat due to the high gradient and scouring.

After considering observations made during the site visits, staff has also concluded that the nominated portion of the North Fork Buffalo River and its tributaries satisfies all three of the eligibility criteria to be considered for designation as Exceptional Waters. The environmental setting, recreational opportunities, and aquatic communities in the nominated segment of North Fork Buffalo River appear to be of exceptional quality.



Wild Geranium near
Roberts Creek



Trillium near
Rocky Branch